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PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHAM #0498/01 0541014
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 231014Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4533
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000498

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

STATE FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/PPD, IIP/GNEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: KING DENIES FEAR OF ALTERNATIVE PALESTINIAN HOME

11. (U) SUMMARY: During a February 16 meeting with community leaders, King Abdullah defiantly asserted that "Jordan is not a substitute homeland for Palestinians." This and related remarks denying any fear of the so-called Jordanian option received front-page attention in all major newspapers and extensive treatment in op-ed pages. Commentary noted the King's emphasis on having confidence in Jordan's future and the need to stay focused on economic reforms. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) In a meeting on February 16 with tribal and political officials from Jordan's twelve governorates, King Abdullah stressed Jordan's "ability to protect its interests," defiantly asserting that "Jordan is not a substitute homeland for Palestinians." [Note: The "Jordan Option" has been long considered an alternative solution by some to the commonly accepted two-state solution, i.e. the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. The Jordan Option proposes re-incorporating the West Bank into Jordanian territory, and is contrary to the Kingdom's policy of supporting Palestinian political sovereignty, following the late King Hussein's renouncement of any claim to West Bank territory in 1988. End Note.] King Abdullah's remarks generated extensive, front-page coverage in all major newspapers the following day. Banner headlines summarized the King's main messages, particularly that he "has no fears of conspiracies," that "Jordan can protect its interests," and that he is "optimistic about the future of our country." News content consisted strictly of the story issued by the official Jordan News Agency.

13. (U) In rejecting discussion of the so-called Jordanian option (reportedly attributed to "extremists in Israel and their supporters in the U.S."), King Abdullah stated that Jordan's only role in the Palestinian Territories was "a supporting one to help the brethren in their efforts to establish their independent state on their national soil." He reportedly described the two-state solution as "the only way to achieve security and stability in the region." In expressing his confidence in the kingdom's future, the King said, "It is the Jewish state rather than the Hashemite state that is under pressure to end the conflict," noting the rising percentage of Israel's Arab citizens. He also expressed his hope for progress in efforts to achieve peace under the new U.S. administration, referring to the "initial signs of the administration's interest in finding a solution to the conflict and achieving peace in the region."

14. (SBU) COMMENT: King Abdullah's remarks revealed deep unease over the prospects for Arab-Israeli engagement and a durable peace. Claims of confidence notwithstanding, discussion of the Jordanian option is at the top of the agenda for many of post's media and civil society interlocutors, and it dominated the Ambassador's first on-the-record interview with local news outlets. END COMMENT

15. (U) Editorial Commentary

-- "We Are Going in the Right Direction and Jordan Can Protect Its Interests"

The front-page editorial of the February 17 edition of the leading,

government-owned Arabic daily Al-Rai reiterated King Abdullah's remarks at length, stating that his meeting with community leaders was the first in a series that "seek to discuss ways to face internal and external challenges.... We have no fear of plots because we are confident about Jordan's strength and capabilities. What we are asked to do is to adopt a firm stand toward the doubts that some people are trying to spread within our Jordanian society." [Note: There has been speculation among some Jordanian politicians, civil society leaders, and local media circles that there are external forces re-introducing the Jordan Option as a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. End Note]

-- "The Leader Doesn't Lie to His Followers"

Chief editor Nabil Sharif, named as the new Information Minister in a February 22 cabinet re-shuffle, in the February 17 edition of the government-aligned, pro-Palestinian Arabic daily Ad-Dustour commented that the King's words "were marked by confidence, openness, and transparency.... Jordan is not a weak entity that is frightened by real or imagined fears.... It is time to end all these distorted fabrications."

-- "How Does Jordan Become Weak?"

Columnist and political analyst Mohammad Abu Rumman in the February 18 edition of the independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad observes, "The King has spoken on this issue repeatedly and it is a non-negotiable red line not to be crossed, as it constitutes a threat to domestic civil peace and Jordanian national security.... When the King hints at the importance of team work to strengthen and solidify the Jordanian position in the face of all pressures, he is placing the community before its responsibility in confronting the internal and

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external challenges, because all political agendas will then fall if the national agenda is clear, specific and directed."

-- "The Monday Meeting"

Columnist Sameeh Al-Ma'itah in the February 18 edition of Al-Ghad reiterates, "The main message that the King wanted to convey to Jordanians is that they should have faith in themselves and in their country and that any form of conspiracy or ideas put forth about the Jordan option or the alternative homeland have no path to success."

-- "King's Remarks: Messages to the Inside and the Outside"

Managing editor Fahed Khitan in the February 18 edition of the independent, opposition Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm remarks, "Clearly the King does not depend on a positive attitude by Israel to salvage the peace process, and with the exception of hopes pinned on efforts by U.S. President Barack Obama to launch serious peace negotiations, the ceiling of Jordanian expectations is very low." Khitan also notes the King's call to "turn to the inside and work on economic and political modernization programs."

-- "His Majesty the King Reassures Us"

Columnist Jihad Al-Momani in the February 19 edition of Al-Rai concludes, "As the King said, Jordan is not suffering from pressures like Israel is. Our stands are clear, our will is strong, and our determination is steadfast in rejecting all that might harm our sovereignty, our future and our national choice of standing by the brethren in Palestine until they obtain their rights through the establishment of their independent state, which is the homeland of all Palestinians, just as Jordan is the homeland of all Jordanians."

-- "Stop Selling Fear to Us"

Columnist Abdel Hameed Al-Majali in the February 19 edition of Al-Rai echoes, "There is no fear for Jordan over others' conspiracies. It is more than capable of facing up to them. But our enemies are the ones who continue to sell us fear in the midst of our own society, intentionally or not. This fear and skepticism must stop because it is the profession of those who want the

homeland and the people to live in constant fear and doubt about their present and their future."

BEECROFT